

When a Student is Diagnosed with COVID-19

The first thing to think about is giving yourself time to recognize your own feelings and take some time to talk with a couple other colleagues or close friends about how hard this is. If we can process our own reactions and diffuse the emotional impact, we'll have an easier time once we see the student during the call (assuming you're able to video call).

The developmental stage of the child and how sick they are with the virus will determine choice of language, content of conversation and – if they're really sick – whether you can speak with them directly. If you are able to talk with the student, take the gist of this and make it developmentally appropriate.

You might think about whether there is something you could order to be delivered to the home, even though it won't arrive before your call. Letting them know to expect it will be a nice moment in your conversation.

It would be important to check in with the parents/caregiver for the child first, which will help you organize your thoughts about the call. You may not want to ask these questions directly, but you might want to glean insights about some of the following:

- Are other family members also ill?
- Is the child at home or in a hospital?
- Any sense of prognosis?
- Is the child more fearful of his/her fate or hopeful that s/he'll be OK
- Are adults caring for this child feeling hopeful or fearful?
- Is there anything in particular the child would like that you might be able to order for delivery? This comes with great caution about whether it can be safely sanitized, etc.
- Are there staff from the school the child particularly likes?

Based on information you gather from that call, think about who you might want to join you on the call with the student. It is helpful to have two or three people from the school on the call so you can take turns interacting with the student. If one of you feels like you've hit a dead end, another might be able to pick up the conversation.

Possible actions to take ahead of time:

- Check with your administration to find out whether there are any constraints you should know about before making the call.
- Check in the student's parent first
- Consider ordering a little gift online to be delivered to the student
- Find out who some of the student's favorite teachers and staff are and invite a couple to join the call.
- Find out whether there are special clubs, teams or extra-curricular activities that the student enjoyed and find a connection to them.

- Give everyone who will be on the call this basic information, not because you need to adhere to it, but because it may give you helpful ideas as you are on the call
- Be prepared for any or all of you to have tears during the call. Many students who are diagnosed will want to put on a strong front for the family, and having the opportunity to let down with people from outside the family may be a great gift.

Some thoughts going into it:

- Students will feel more able to be honest if we are transparent and allow ourselves to be vulnerable to our own emotions, as long as we manage them such that the student feels understood, but does not feel the need to comfort you!
- There's no reason to do this alone unless you absolutely can't find someone else the student knows to join you.
- Often staff who teach all students are great resources (librarian, PE teacher, music, art, etc.) It would be terrific if the music teacher ended up leading a song everybody knew that the student likes. You might try to be ready with a possible activity or "do together" moment if one comes to mind.

Once you're on the call with the student, you might

- Start with a statement of observation.... *"None of us could have imagined something like this could happen"*
- *Everyone has been thrown (or surprised) at all that has happened.*
- If you haven't had COVID:
 - *We know we can't imagine how this is for you*
 - *Do you want to tell us what it was like when did you first realized you were sick?*
 - *Would you tell us what its been like?*
- If you have had COVID
 - *You could say that you've had it and you're wondering how it is similar for the two of you. You could go on to mention your headache and ask if the student also has headaches, etc. Invite the student to tell you how it has been for him/her.*
- If teachers and classmates know, you could let the student know that they've been asking about him/her.
- You can tell the student that you ordered something that will be arriving and reinforce that they need to do the sanitizing of the package when it arrives.
- Ask the student whether friends know/have been in touch... *Is it helpful to talk with friends?*
- *What has been the most help for you?*
- *If there were one thing that you'd like that maybe one of us could do, what would that be?*

If you feel like you can, you might ask questions about who is providing care:

- *Who is with you and who all helps take care of you?*
- *Is there anything you can think of that we could do for them?*

At some point the conversation will likely take on a life of its own, which is great! Additional comments might include:

- *Are there other staff from school you'd like to be in on a call with you?*
- *Is there any other little treasure we could order for you?*

At some point you're ready to wrap it up for now, but maybe ask about future calls.

- *Would you like us to call again?*

So a snapshot of all of this might be:

- deal with your own reactions/feelings first
- take into account the developmental stage of the child
- is there something you could order for the child that s/he'd really like?
- consider the prognosis and how sick the child is at this time
- talk with a parent/caregiver first and learn what you can
 - is the child feeling hopeful or fearful
 - who are those from the school the child would most like to hear from